

Discourse Effects on Subject Positions

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1. Introduction

It is well-known that inversion in English is more restrictive than in Italian, which permits Free Inversion: the subject is reversed by the verb “freely”. Contrary to Italian, English does not permit the postverbal subject, as shown in (2b).

- (1) a. Qui ha gridato? (Italian)
- b. Ha gridato [Gianni]
- (2) a. Who screamed? (English)
- b. *Screamed [John]

Examples in (3) illustrate that, given the VP-internal Subject Hypothesis, the internal argument of unaccusative and passive verbs in English must not stay in VP. It has been assumed that they are forced to move to [Spec, IP] in order to avoid a violation of the Case-Filter. By contrast, Italian DPs can stay in situ in the same environment.

- (3) a. *Was killed [Carlos] (passive)
- b. *Arrived [Juan] (unaccusative)
- c. *Walked [Gomez] (unergative)

This does not amount to saying that English disallows any kind of inversion. As shown in (4)-(6), English tolerates various types of inversion or postverbal subjects.

- (4) a. Especially remarkable was [her oval face]

- b. Faint grew [the sound of the bell]
- (5) a. In the garden stands [a big fountain]
- b. On the table has been placed [a tarte Tatin]
- (6) a. "Wonderful place," said [Maria]
- b. So said [Luis]

In (4), the subjects are reversed by the complement. (5a) and (5b) are locative inversion constructions, which are characterized by a preverbal prepositional phrase and a postverbal noun phrase. (6a) and (6b) are called quotative inversion, in which the verb takes a direct speech complement.

In this article, I will explicate why inversion is unacceptable in (3) but acceptable in (4), (5), and (6). There are three points to be noted. First, syntactic and discourse constraints interact. Second, inversion is conditional, although it has been assumed to be optional in the Chomskyan Theory. Third, the checking of EPP and Case feature is separated, as Chomsky (1995) and Collins (1997) propose. In the optimality-theoretic account, the constraint of the EPP is separated from that of Case.

2. Proposal

2.1 Separating the EPP from Case Checking

Collins (1997) claims that the EPP and the Case feature are checked separately in [Spec, IP]¹. There are at least three pieces of evidence for his idea. See below.

- (7) Experiencer Subject

[Calvini] liki verkiD.

Calvini-dat like the job-nom

(8) Clausal Subject

[To read books] is interesting.

(9) PP Subject

[Under the table] is a good place to hide.

These are examples in which constituents other than nominative DPs appear in [Spec, IP]. Dative nouns in Icelandic can appear in the subject position, as in (7). This is strange if movement to [Spec, IP] is driven by (nominative) Case checking. In (8) and (9), non-nominal constituents occur in [Spec, IP]. It is also clear that Case checking does not trigger PP or IP movement to [Spec, IP]. It is too hasty to have recourse to the EPP, however, since the original version of the EPP entails that subjects are limited to be nominative. Strictly speaking, examples (7), (8), and (9) violates the EPP, since the nominative DP does not occur in the subject position.

(10) the Extended Projection Principle

Clauses have Subjects

(Chomsky (1981))

Then, to solve the problem, I propose a new constraint on the subject position.

(11) EPP

the Spec of IP must be filled

(cf. Grimshaw and Lodovich (1995))

(11) requires that the subject position must be filled. It is violated when nothing occupies [Spec, IP] or null subjects (*pro*) appear there. Examples (7), (8), and (9) satisfy SUBJECT, if we assume that the DP,

IP, and PP occupy the Spec of IP.

2.2 Inversion is Conditional

Inversion like (4) is sometimes called “free inversion”, in that inversion is freely replaced by non-inversion. It is not the case from the point of discourse: Inversion is used only if a speaker/writer wants to put focus on the subject, instead of the object. Postverbal subjects in inversion constructions are presentationally focused².

- (12) a. [She] lives in the wood
b. ?In the wood lives [she]

The marginal status of (12b) is attributable to a discourse function of inversion; the postverbal position is allocated for new information. Thus, pronominal subjects, old information, are not likely to be used there. In this respect, it is wrong to say that inversion takes place freely, but evidently it is conditional.

3 Discussion

3.1 The Ranking of Constraints in English Inversion

Three constraints are necessary to explain patterns of inversion. I assume, first, that two constraints are involved in the canonical subject position: EPP and CASE.

- (13) EPP
the Spec of IP must be filled

- (14) CASE
DPs are licensed in the Spec of IP

CASE requires nominative DPs to be licensed in [Spec, IP]. It is

violated when constituents other than nominative subjects do not occupy [Spec, IP], or when nothing appears there. Therefore, when the PP is located in [Spec, IP] like (9), EPP is satisfied but CASE is violated. If the nominative DP appears there, both constraints are satisfied.

Next, I propose a constraint relevant to a discourse function.

(15) ALIGN-FOCUS

The focused NP must appear postverbally

ALIGN-FOCUS is a revised version of Costa's (1997) proposal, saying that focused subjects need not occur at the rightmost position, but just appear at the postverbal position. This is because an adverbial phrase can appear after the postverbal subject in *there*-constructions. In (16), the focused constituent *a beautiful fountain* is not located at the rightmost position, but the postverbal position.

(16) There is a beautiful fountain in the garden.

I assume that the three constraints are ranked in English, as follows:

(17) EPP >> ALIGN-FOCUS >> CASE

EPP is the top-most constraint, while CASE is ranked relatively low. The reason is that movement to [Spec, IP] is driven by not CASE but EPP. ALIGN-FOCUS is placed below EPP.

Let us first consider the following inversion constructions.

(18) A cat jumped onto the table

- (19) a. [_{IP} Onto the table [_{VP} jumped [a cat]]]
 b. * [_{IP} Onto the table [_{IP} [a cat] [_{VP} jumped]]]
 c. * [_{IP} [_{VP} Jumped onto the table] [a cat]]

(18) is the input, from which GEN produces three outputs or candidates, as in (19). In (19a), the locative PP is in [Spec, IP], and the subject occurs postverbally. The subject is in [Spec, IP] and the locative PP is topicalized and adjoined to IP in (19b). The subject of (19c) is postposed, but the locative PP stays in VP.

	EPP	ALIGN	CASE
☞ a. [IP Onto the table [VP jumped] a cat]			*
b. [IP Onto the table [IP a cat [VP jumped]]		* !	
c. [IP Jumped [VP onto the table] a cat]	* !		

(T1) input: (V (x,y), Focus: x)

(19a) violates only CASE. The locative PP in [Spec, IP] satisfies EPP, and the postverbal subject does ALIGN-FOCUS. In (19b), the subject satisfies both EPP and CASE. As a result, ALIGN-FOCUS is violated. In (18c), the highest-ranked constraint EPP is violated, since nothing occupies the subject position. Comparing the three candidates, we can get the correct result: candidate (a) is optimal, because the other candidates violate either the highest or the second highest constraint, which candidate (a) satisfies. Therefore, the ranking given in (17) is plausible and well-motivated.

Next, consider the case where inversion is not allowed, even if the subject is focused. Postverbal subjects cause ungrammaticality in unaccusative and passive constructions. The internal arguments of such verbs must always move to [Spec, IP] in English. This is correctly predicted by the ranking of (17).

- (20) a. *Arrived John
 b. John arrived

	EPP	ALIGN	CASE
a. [IP [VP Arrived] John]	*!		
☞ b. [IP John [VP arrived]]		*	

(T2) input: (V (x), Focus: x)

In candidate (b), ALIGN-FOCUS is violated in order to satisfy EPP, since the focused subject *John* is located in [Spec, IP]. On the other hand, candidate (a) violates EPP, because the subject is postposed. Accordingly, candidate (b) is properly chosen as the optional output. The same is true of passive sentences.

- (21) a. *Was killed [the man]
 b. [The man] was killed

(21a) is ungrammatical, since EPP is unsatisfied. Even if the internal argument is focused, therefore, it is forbidden to appear postverbally. However, all passive sentences do not tolerate postverbal subjects. See the following examples.

- (22) a. [A tarte Tatin] has been placed on the table
 b. On the table has been placed [a tarte Tatin]

(22b), a passive sentence in Locative Inversion, has a postverbal subject. This leads us to say that postverbal subjects are acceptable even in passive constructions if some condition is fulfilled.

Based on the observations so far, we can make a generalization of the inversion pattern in English, as follows.

- (23) A Generalization of English Inversion

Inversion is possible only if some constituent, instead of the subject DP, occupies [Spec, IP].

It is evident that postverbal subjects cannot satisfy EPP. If there is a substitute that can be fronted, it must satisfy the constraint, instead of the postverbal subject. For example, inversion is generally ungrammatical in passive sentences, since there is no substitute in [Spec, IP]. However, if the position is filled with something like a locative PP in (22b), inversion is permitted. Remember that the subject is required to appear postverbally, as long as it is presentationally focused.

3.2 Inversion in Romance

Next turn to Romance inversion. Unlike English, ALIGN-FOCUS is ranked highest, and EPP is higher than CASE in Italian.

(24) ALIGN-FOCUS >> EPP >> CASE

(24) should predict that inversion is possible in (25), even though [Spec, IP] remains empty.

- (25) a. Telefoneranno [molti esperti]
 b. *[Molti esperti] telefoneranno
 “Many experts will telephone”

	ALIGN	EPP	CASE
☞ a. [[telefoneranno] molti esperti]		*	
b. [molti esperti [telefoneranno]]	*!		

(T3) input: (V (x), Focus: x)

In candidate (a), the focused subject satisfies the topmost constraint

ALIGN-FOCUS, although it violates EPP (and CASE). On the other hand, candidate (b) crucially violates ALIGN-FOCUS, because the subject occurs in [Spec, IP]. Therefore, we can get the correct result: candidate (a) is optimal.

What brings about the differences between English and Italian inversion? My major claim is that it comes from the difference of whether or not a language permits null-subjects. As mentioned above, EPP is failed by null-subjects. This means that EPP is a relatively low-ranked constraint in Null-Subject Languages like Italian so that they can permit null-subjects. On the other hand, EPP is strictly observed in English; null-subjects are not permitted, and a lexical dummy is inserted into [Spec, IP], when the subject occurs in other positions (e.g. *there*-constructions). It means that EPP is a relatively higher-ranked constraint in Non Null-Subject Languages like English to exclude the possibility of the empty subject. This idea might be consistent with the discussion in Chomsky (1981) and Rizzi (1982), who state that null-subjects and postverbal subjects are closely connected.

- (26) a. Null-Subject Languages
EPP is relatively low-ranked
- b. Non Null-Subject Languages
EPP is relatively high-ranked

3.3 Case and Grammatical Relations

As mentioned in (12), pronominal subjects are unlikely to occur in the postverbal position. In addition, an accusative is worse than a

nominative pronoun in grammatically.

- (27) a. ?Under the garden wall sat [I]
 b. *Under the garden wall sat [me]

What causes this difference? It is important to note that verbs in inversion agree with not preverbal materials but postverbal subjects.

- (28) a. Especially remarkable were [his oval face and snub nose]
 b. *Especially remarkable was [his oval face and snub nose]

This illustrates that the concord relation between the subject and the verb holds even if the subject does not appear in the canonical position. Whaley (1997) mentions that agreement typically operate according to a hierarchy of relations. The agreement hierarchy predicts that if verb agreement is employed to signal the grammatical relation of any one nominal, it will be with the subject.

(29) The Agreement Hierarchy

subject > direct object > indirect object > other

Then, I propose the following constraint, based on his idea.

(30) CONC(ord)

Nominative DP must agree with V

This constraint competes with CASE, which has not played an important role so far.

	CONC	CASE
☞ a. Under the garden wall sat I		*
b. Under the garden wall sat me	*!	

(T4) input: (V (x), Focus: x)

If CONC is ranked higher than CASE, we can get the correct result.

Candidate (a) violates CASE, in that the nominative DP is not located in [Spec, IP]. However, it satisfies CONC, since there is one DP which can agree with V and it shows nominative. On the other hand, CASE is virtually satisfied in candidate (b), where no nominative DP appears. The candidate crucially violates CONC, since the DP which agrees with V is not nominative but accusative.

4. Conclusion

It has been argued that Optimality Theory can predict the patterns of inversion in English. Inversion takes place only if the subject is presentationally focused, and some constituent occurs in [Spec, IP] to satisfy EPP instead of the postverbal subject. This is the result of the interactions of the constraints in (17).

In addition, I mentioned the different behavior of English and Italian inversion. It is plausible to due it to the difference of whether a given language permits null-subjects or not.

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NOTES

- ¹ In the latest version of the Minimalist Program, the inflectional projection is labeled TP. Here, the projection between CP and VP is labeled IP in a traditional fashion.
- ² Contrastive focus is marked by intonation or left-fronting in English. However, I will not deal with it, here.

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